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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [SU](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT: GOOD TURNOUT AS QATAR TILTS
BACK TOWARDS THE ARAB MIDDLE

REF: DOHA 222

Classified By: Ambassador Joseph E. LeBaron, for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

(C) KEY POINTS

-- 17 Arab League heads of state and government attended the Doha Summit, up from 11 last year. Qatar's decision not to invite Iranian President Ahmadinejad helped.

-- Highlights from the final statement appear in the main text below. The statement supported Sudanese President Bashir in a clear rebuff to the International Criminal Court's warrant for his arrest issued earlier this month.

-- The statement was largely silent on Iran, as we were told it would be. There was, however, the now traditional language about the need to work out a solution to three UAE islands that Iran claims.

-- The summit ended early, as attendees apparently could not agree on a common way forward for Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. (More details as we get them.)

(C) AMBASSADOR'S COMMENTS

Six short analytic notes:

-- UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's prominent attendance at an international conference also attended by Sudanese President Bashir, the first sitting president to be under ICC indictment for war crimes, was noteworthy. It illustrates the complicated, compartmentalized reaction here to the ICC action.

-- For the Arab League member states, the reflexive support for a fellow Arab head of state trumped any humanitarian and moral concern about the large-scale killing and suffering in Darfur and Bashir's guilt in it.

-- More welcome: Arab leaders refrained from criticizing the United States. In fact, just the opposite occurred. In their speeches at the opening session, Qatar's Amir and others worked in some favorable references to the new U.S. Administration, detecting the beginning of new narrative by the U.S. government towards the region.

-- Qatar appears to be tilting back toward the Arab middle. The Summit was far different from the debacle here January 16th. Then, Qatar, falling just short of getting an Arab League quorum to gather, hosted a radical camp meeting that included not only the Arab League rejectionists, but Ahmadinejad and several Palestinian terrorist organizations. Now, Qatar excluded the Iranian president, and HAMAS's Khalid Mish'al. It even did its bit for Arab reconciliation,

bringing Libyan leader Qaddafi and the Saudi King together. Qatar also facilitated a meeting between Jordan's King Abdullah II with Syria's President Bashar Al-Assad.

-- In the increasingly zero-sum contest between Egypt and Qatar for diplomatic influence in the region, the Summit was a win for Qatar and a loss for Egypt, as economic power and political influence in the Arab world (gradually) shift east from the Levant toward Iraq and the Gulf. (More on that in a later cable.)

-- That said, the Summit will damage, perhaps fatally, the Qatar-led Darfur Initiative, handing Egypt a "win" there, if that is the right word. Shamefully, the Summit strengthened Bashir and Darfur's rebel groups now have all the more reason to distrust the Arab League, including member state Qatar.

End Key Points and Ambassador's Comments.

¶1. (U) Following are highlights of the "Doha Declaration" issued at the close of the March 30-31 Arab League Summit:

SUDAN: Arab leaders expressed their support of Sudan in face of "all threats targeting its security, stability, and territorial integrity" and rejected all actions that threaten the peace efforts exerted by the state of Qatar within the framework of the Arab-African Ministerial Committee and in coordination with the mediator of the joint UN and African Union. The Arab League further confirmed its support of Sudan in bringing peace to Darfur.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE: The Arab leaders expressed their

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commitment to strengthening Arab solidarity and settling any differences through constructive dialogue. "We salute the Palestinian resistance and deny the Israeli assault on Gaza. We call for a (enduring) cease-fire, halt to the blockade, and the opening of all border crossings. Israel must be held accountable for its war crimes and violations of international law. We support all Arab efforts to enhance Palestinian unity and we ask Palestinian factions to respond to those efforts in order to reach geo-political unification of Palestinian territories."

"We strongly object to unilateral Israeli policies, including colonization activities and we call for the destruction of the wall of separation."

"We call on Israel to set a timeframe to commit to the peace process and take clear measures to reach that peace based on the Arab peace initiative and international references."

SYRIA/LEBANON: Arab leaders pointed out that in addition to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Golan Heights and Shebaa Farms should be restored to Syria and Lebanon, respectively.

IRAQ: The communique reiterated Arab League respect for the unity, sovereignty, and independence of Iraq while supporting a political course based on the participation of different Iraqi groups.

IRAN: Arab leaders called upon Iran to respond to the UAE initiative to find a solution for the three UAE islands, either through direct talks or the International Court of Justice.

TERRORISM: The Arab League rejected any "form, source or reason" for terrorism and agreed to eradicate it. (Note: The final statement stayed clear of defining terrorism as it relates to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.)

NUCLEAR ISSUES: Leaders stressed the importance of eradication of all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. Israel should adhere to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation

Treaty, and the IAEA must give guarantees about the nuclear activities and facilities of Israel. Arab countries, they continued, have a legitimate right to own nuclear technology use for peaceful purposes in order to serve their development programs and support the diversification of their economies and energy resources.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Arab leaders confirmed their continued desire to work for the establishment of a free-trade zone among Arab states in order to develop Arab economic partnerships, increase Arab investments, and prevent negative impacts of the global financial crisis.

SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT: The final communique called on the international community to support developing countries in closing the gap between rich and poor countries. The statement also stressed the importance of enhancing the national identity of Arab children, providing job opportunities for Arab youth, and emphasized the importance of preserving the Arabic language that reflects the culture, identity and heritage of Arabs.

AN EARLY CLOSE AS ISRAEL/PALESTINE DIVIDE THE ARABS

12. (C) The Arab League Summit in Doha closed the evening of March 30 instead of the following morning. The decision was made with relative haste, as ambassadors were summoned to the conference site at the Sheraton Hotel with about 30 minutes of notice. A local press source told us the members of the Arab League were at an impasse on moving forward about Israel. It was clear to the Qatari hosts that further discussions into the morning would not be productive. Hence, the Amir of Qatar moved up the closing ceremony.

13. (C) MFA Assistant Minister for Follow-up Affairs Mohamed Al-Rumaihi told DCM March 30 that Arab leaders would remain for the South American-Arab League Summit starting the afternoon of March 31. He said the closing ceremony took place earlier than planned because the delegates "had finished their business."

UNITY ON SUDAN

14. (C) A local press source told us that Arab League delegations quickly arrived in their discussions at a

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consensus position on the International Criminal Court (ICC) indictment against Sudanese President Bashir. The Arab League supported Bashir in his efforts to suspend the pending indictment. In his speech before the Summit, Bashir accused Western countries of unfairly targeting him. He noted that the United States, which is not a member of the ICC and has stated its refusal to hand over Americans to the ICC, nonetheless supports the indictment of an African leader.

15. (C) UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon described the situation in Sudan as volatile, expressing his concern at the Sudanese Government's decision to expel key international non-governmental organizations. The UNSYG also welcomed the progress many Arab states have made towards Millennium Development Goals and stressed, with respect to Palestine, the need for a durable cease-fire, open crossings and Palestinian reconciliation under President Abbas.

PROGRESS ON RECONCILIATION

16. (C) Other than a misunderstanding between the Amir of Qatar and Libyan leader Qaddafi at the opening session of the Summit, public displays of discord were rare. In the

Libyan-Qatari contretemps, Qaddafi was speaking with the Saudi King in a voice loud enough that many participants could hear him. Fearing he was launching into a lengthy speech, the Amir asked him to be quiet. Ironically, observers reported that Qaddafi was making positive remarks about Arab reconciliation at the time. Qaddafi stormed out and was reported to have departed Doha. (It turns out he went to the Islamic Art Museum and returned to the Sheraton later in the day.)

¶7. (C) The Amir of Qatar, after making things right with Qaddafi, succeeded in bringing him together with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in a meeting aimed at reconciling the Libyan and Saudi leaders. Separately, Jordan's King Abdullah II met with Syria's President Bashar Al-Assad in what a Syrian reporter described as an effort aimed at "intensifying efforts to boost positive...relations."

GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS A CONCERN

¶8. (C) While the final statement of the Arab League leaders following the Summit may not highlight it, the global financial crisis was a general theme that leaders addressed in their speeches in Doha. Leaders alluded to the upcoming G-20 meeting in London as an occasion when Arab states, particularly from the Gulf, will be inadequately represented based on their wealth and importance as global investors.
LeBaron